



STATE OF WASHINGTON

COMMISSION ON HISPANIC AFFAIRS  
COMISIÓN DE ASUNTOS HISPANOS

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February 17, 2004

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*Antonio M. Ginatta,*  
Executive Director

Senator Bill Finkbeiner  
Senate Majority Leader  
207 Newhouse Bldg.  
PO Box 40445  
Olympia, WA 98504-0445

Senator Patricia Hale  
Senate Majority Caucus Chair  
206-A Newhouse Bldg.  
PO Box 40408  
Olympia, WA 98504-0408

Dear Senator Finkbeiner and Senator Hale:

The Commission on Hispanic Affairs, mandated by the people of Washington to advise the Legislature on issues of concern to the Hispanic community, would like to respectfully advise the Legislature on the need for a select committee on health care disparities. Senator Rosa Franklin has sponsored legislation (SCR 8419) that would establish such a select committee, and we believe that this legislation is an important first step in identifying potential solutions to the problem of health care disparities in our state.

At the Commission, we have heard four different varieties of the disparity argument: disparate access to health care; disparate insurance coverage; disparate health care staffing; and disparate rates of disease. These different varieties of the disparity problem result in situations like the following:

- In the state of Washington, Latina expectant mothers are more than twice as likely to have late or no prenatal care compared to non-Hispanic whites (Center for Disease Control, National Vital Statistics Report, 2002);

1210 Eastside St. 1<sup>st</sup> Floor PO Box 40924 Olympia, WA 98504-0924  
Toll-Free: (800) 443-0294 Olympia: (360) 753-3159 Fax: (360) 753-0199  
[hispanic@cha.wa.gov](mailto:hispanic@cha.wa.gov) [www.cha.wa.gov](http://www.cha.wa.gov)

- As to access problems, the Commission has heard testimony several times on the problems that Latinos have in accessing mental health services compared to non-Latino whites;
- Even when controlling for socioeconomic factors, racial and ethnic minority groups are still less likely than non-Hispanic whites to receive cardiac care, from diagnostic procedures to therapy (American College of Cardiology);
- Several studies show that Latinos are significantly less likely to be insured or to have a family physician when compared to non-Latino whites;
- As to the problem of disparate staffing, Hispanics make up 12% of the population of the US, but only 3% of all physicians are of Latino origin (Commonwealth Fund, 1999);
- Latino children are more than 13 times more likely than non-Hispanic whites to be infected with tuberculosis; additionally, asthma affects one out of ten children of Puerto Rican descent, more than triple the rate of non-Hispanic whites (Journal of the American Medical Association, 2002); and
- Latina women in the US are significantly more likely to die due to a pregnancy complication compared to non-Latina women (JAMA, 2002).

These examples scratch the surface of the pervasiveness of the disparity problem. Disparities are clear, prevalent, and across the board. The Commission advises the Legislature to move forward to find solutions to these differences. Passing SCR 8419 would be an important first step.

Thank you for your time, and we are available at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Antonio M. Ginatta  
Executive Director

cc: Senator Luke Esser  
Senator Rosa Franklin  
Senator Margarita Prentice  
Senator Pat Thibaudeau